Svāṅga-kumbhāntarādikā śṛṅkhalā

The chain of practice that begins with an inner breath-retention held within one's own body.

द्विविधा श्रृङ्खला प्रोक्ता स्वङ्गकुम्भान्तरादिका॥१७५॥

dvividhā śṛṅkhalā proktā svaṅgakumbhāntarādikā ||175||

175. A two-fold chain of practice is taught, beginning with inner breath-retention performed within the limbs of one's own body.

असुः प्राणस्तदङ्गौ रेचकपूरौ तदुक्तं पूरः।
कुम्भः पुनः पूरः कुम्भपूरौ पुनः पुनः।
पूरयेत्कुम्भकश्रान्तः पूरश्रान्तश्च कुम्भयेत्॥१७६॥

asuḥ prāṇas tad-aṅgau recaka-pūrau tad uktaṃ pūraḥ |
kumbhaḥ punaḥ pūraḥ kumbha-pūrau punaḥ punaḥ |
pūrayet kumbhaka-śrāntaḥ pūra-śrāntaś ca kumbhayet || 176 ||

176. The life-breath, prāṇa, has two limbs (phases), exhalation and inhalation, hence, inhalation is called "filling." After every inhalation comes retention, so inhalation and retention should follow one another again and again: when tired of holding the breath, inhale; when tired of inhaling, hold the breath.

पूरकं पूरकं कुर्यात् तथा कुम्भं च कुम्भकम् ।
यावच्छक्तिस् ततः कुर्याद् रेचकं कुम्भकं पुनः ॥१७७॥

pūrakaṃ pūrakaṃ kuryāt tathā kumbhaṃ ca kumbhakam |
yāvacchaktis tataḥ kuryād recakaṃ kumbhakaṃ punaḥ || 177 ||

177. He should inhale again and again and likewise hold the breath again and again; then, as far as his strength allows, let him exhale and at once resume holding the breath (in the same manner).

रेचकं कुम्भकं कुर्याद् गुरुदर्शितमार्गतः ।
रेचकं रेचकं कुर्यात् स्वाङ्गशृङ्खलोदिता ॥१७८॥

recakaṃ kumbhakaṃ kuryād gurudarśitamārgataḥ |
recakaṃ recakaṃ kuryāt svāṅgaśṛṅkhaloditā || 178 ||

178. Following the path pointed out by the Guru, he should exhale and then hold the breath; thereafter, as the chain within his own body prescribes, he is to keep exhaling, breath after breath.

हंसवेधं विना नैव कर्त्तव्यश्च कदाचन ।

ईश्वरप्रणिधानेन सिद्ध्यते नात्र संशयः ॥१७९॥

haṃsavedhaṃ vinā naiva karttavyaś ca kadācana |
īśvarapraṇidhānena sidhyate nātra saṃśayaḥ || 179||

179. Without first performing the haṃsa-piercing, this must never be attempted; through devotion to Īśvara[1] it succeeds, of this there is no doubt.

1. ईश्वर (īśvara) → ईश् (īś) + व (va) + र (ra) "Master of the air (breath) possessing the motion of amorous (love) play (which) gives bright (shining) splendour (of the great light)." - Saṃdhā-bhāṣā translation.

गुरुमीशं समुल्लङ्घ्य यः कुर्यात् स विनश्यति।
नाशिष्याय प्रदातव्यो नाभक्ताय कदाचन॥
अपरिक्षितशिष्याय ददन् दुःखमवाप्नुयात्॥१८०॥

gurumīśaṃ samullaṅghya yaḥ kuryāt sa vinaśyati |
nāśiṣyāya pradātavyo nābhaktāya kadācana ||
aparīkṣitaśiṣyāya dadan duḥkham avāpnuyāt ||180||

180. He who having completely transgressed Guru and God is ruined by whatever he undertakes. This instruction must never be given to one who is not a disciple, nor to one devoid of devotion; imparting it to an untested pupil brings sorrow to the giver.

ब्रह्मरन्ध्रप्रवेशे च कुण्डलीबोधनं परम् ।
नाडीशुद्धिं मेरुसिद्धिमारोग्यं च प्रयच्छति ॥
रेचकः क्षीणतां याति पूरकश्चातिवर्धते ॥१८१॥

brahmarandhrapraveśe ca kuṇḍalībodhanaṃ param |
nāḍīśuddhiṃ merusiddhim ārogyaṃ ca prayacchati |
recakaḥ kṣīṇatāṃ yāti pūrakaś cātivardhate || 181 ||

181. At the moment prāṇa enters the aperture of Brahma, it brings about the supreme awakening of Kuṇḍalinī, grants purification of the nāḍīs, bestows attainment of the Meru-siddhi, and perfect health; exhalation (recaka) grows faint, while the inhalation (pūraka) increases greatly.

यस्य नाथः स विख्यातो नमस्यः स सुरासुरैः॥182॥

yasya nāthaḥ sa vikhyāto namasyaḥ sa surāsuraiḥ || 182||

182. He whose lord[2] is renowned is himself honoured, worthy of worship by gods and demons alike.

2. Nāthaḥ (“lord, protector”), can point either to one’s human Guru or to the supreme Lord, Śiva/Īśvara. Honour paid to such an illustrious master naturally reflects upon the devotee. Further, in this context, Nātha, also refers to a term used by women in love addressing their beloved during amorous union (in this context, representing the divine feminine, śakti, during amorous union within (and above) the bridal chamber of the skull).

Kumbhāntara-śṛṅkhalā

A linked sequence of breath-retentions within a breath-retention.

कुम्भेऽन्यकुम्भसंयोगात् स्यात् कुम्भान्तरशृङ्खला।
विचित्रफलदा चेयं गुरुदर्शितमार्गतः॥183॥

kumbhe ’nyakumbhasaṃyogāt syāt kumbhāntaraśṛṅkhalā |
vicitraphaladā ceyaṃ gurudarśitamārgataḥ || 183 ||

183. By combining one breath-retention with another while still in kumbhaka, an inner chain of further retentions arises; proceeding along the path shown by the Guru, it bestows manifold and wondrous fruits.

बलात्कुम्भितवायोश्च हृदयात्प्राणचालनम्॥184॥
balāt kumbhitavāyoś ca hṛdayāt prāṇacālanam ॥184॥

184. By deliberate force, once the breath has been retained in kumbhaka, the movement of prāṇa is set in motion from the heart.[3]

3. One might assume the “heart” here refers to the anāhata cakra, the seat of prāṇa before it is driven upward. In this verse, however, the “heart” points instead to the udāna-vāyu, which rises past the throat into the “cerebral centre”, the seat of Śarva, the “heart” of the brain:

“Then, in the state of emergence, when the Rudra knot is pierced and the vāyu has entered the seat of Śarva, a Vaiṇava sound, like the resonant tone of a ringing vīṇā, is produced.” — Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, IV.76

अधोर्ध्वं स कुम्भस्तु जीवचालः शिवोदितः।
विद्धानां सर्वसिद्धिः स्यादविद्धानां तु ग्रन्थिदः॥ 185॥

adhordhvaṃ sa kumbhas tu jīvacālaḥ śivoditaḥ |
viddhānāṃ sarvasiddhiḥ syād aviddhānāṃ tu granthidaḥ || 185 ||

185. That breath-retention which drives the motion of the life-current in both directions, downward and upward, is proclaimed by Śiva; in those who have been “pierced” it bestows every power, while in the un-pierced it merely tightens those knots[4] (of bondage).

4. For practitioners who have already “pierced” (viddha) the knots (granthi), this kumbhaka propels prāṇa upward and bestows all powers; for those still “unpierced” (aviddha) it only serves to further tighten the very knots that block further progress, hence the warning!

मेरुसिद्धिं समाध्यन्तां साधयेत् सिद्धिवृन्दकम्॥186॥
merusiddhiṁ samādhyantāṃ sādhayet siddhivṛndakam || 186||

186. He should bring about Meru-siddhi,[5] which culminates in samādhi, thereby obtaining an entire multitude of spiritual powers.

5. Mount Meru is the body's central axis, the spine with its subtle channel, the suṣumnā. Meru-siddhi is the full, steady ascent and descent of prāṇa through the suṣumnā, being crowned by the Śiva-liṅga of energy, anointed by abhiṣeka, and finally entering absorption in samādhi.

This English translation and footnotes, Maccidānandanātha, 18th of July, 2025.